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# Marking time with Frederick Douglass

**DOUGLASS**, FROM D-1

One deserves as much honor as the other. The shrine of the one should be as sacred as the shrine of the other to all Americans."

Cedar Hill has been preserved since Douglass's 1895 death by, in turn, his widow, Helen Pitts Douglass, and then the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association which she founded, with help from The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs.

One member of the Colored Women's Clubs was the Married Women's Culture Club of Pittsburgh, which contributed the sundial when the Douglass house was dedicated as a national museum in 1922.

*My face marks the sunny hours. What can you say of yours?*

A plaque on the side of the sundial's pedestal notes the Pittsburgh club's name and the date.



Associated Press

An undated photo of abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

## His life

Douglass escaped bondage in Maryland when he was about 20. In 1845, he published a memoir, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," which he promoted during a tour of Great Britain and Ireland. In an 1846 letter from Belfast, he wrote of his tour:

"I am under a monarchical government. Instead of the bright, blue sky of America, I am covered with the soft, grey fog of the Emerald Isle. I breathe, and lo!, the chattel becomes a man. I gaze around in vain for one who will question my equal humanity, claim me as his slave, or offer me an insult."

This quote is prominently featured next to an original edition of his Narrative at the U.S. National Park Service visitors' center on the same grounds as the house.

Douglass returned to America a free man. From 1847 onward, his frequent speaking tours included regular stops in Pittsburgh. The city's post-Civil War newspaper advertisements and stories describe lectures such as "Sources of Danger to the Republic" and "Republican Government vs. The One Man Power."

Douglass bought Cedar Hill in 1877. He received presidential appointments as a U.S. marshal and a minister to Haiti. He continued to write, lecture and garner international acclaim until his death. He is buried in Rochester, N.Y., where he had published the renowned abolitionist newspaper, The North Star.

The North Star's slogan was "Right is of no Sex — Truth is of no Color — God is the Father of us all, and we are all Brethren." The paper was later merged with the Liberty Party Paper and renamed Frederick Douglass' Paper.

## The gift

The reasons that the Married Women's Culture Club chose a sundial to donate to Cedar Hill are unknown. Having "secured the dial and prior to sending it east for installation at the grounds," the club held a July 9, 1922, dedication ceremony at Pittsburgh's Euclid Avenue A.M.E. Church, according to The Pittsburgh Press. The article noted that "all clubs and the public are invited."

Some club members probably also attended the Cedar Hill ceremony in Washington, which immediately followed the 13th biennial meeting of The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs in Richmond, Va. These women faced segregated trains, hotels and restaurants in their travels, the legacy of the Supreme Court's "separate but equal" ruling the year after Douglass' death.

Women's suffrage, which Douglass had supported since the 1840s, had been granted in 1920. But many African-American women nevertheless continued to be denied the vote, especially in the South. Just three Augusts after the Cedar Hill ceremony, more than 30,000 members of the Ku Klux Klan paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue. In 2018, racial and gender equality remain unfinished business.

Even in the darkest of times, however, the Pittsburgh women's gift of that sundial at Cedar Hill has marked the sunny hours. It still does.

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